



those strange and ugly feelings by flamboyant-lester

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Summary: Eddie has been having a rough time and Richie hasn't made it any better.

those strange and ugly feelings

Eddie can't shake the unpleasantness he feels as he sits there watching Richie fumble around with some clay he had just bought and a spatula he's struggling to use properly. Eddie almost wants to push him out of the way and do it himself.

Twenty minutes earlier when Richie had drug him through the toy isle of the local family dollar, he had told him he was failing his science class. Eddie had asked, "Well why the fuck are we here?" and Richie had replied with,

"Mr. Ruth told me if I made a cell model then he'd give me extra credit."

"But you're in chemistry."

"He said it was the easiest thing he could think of."

And that is how they ended up on Eddie's bedroom floor in the center of a craft supply and snack pack eruption. As for Eddie's unpleasantness, that just happens sometimes, it only became noticeable when Richie pulled a pair of earbuds out of his bag.

"Are those my earbuds?" Eddie asks watching Richie go still for a moment, he slowly turns his head towards Eddie.

"Maybe?" he answers, a guilty smile spreads across his face.

"I swear to god Richie- that's like the tenth pair you've taken."

"Hey, one side is usually blown out anyways!"

Eddie doesn't know why that pisses him off like it does. He stares at Richie.

"Don't look at me like that, you're acting like I rob you daily."

"You do! You take my time, my energy, my food- you just fucking suck." Eddie disputes, he crosses his arms and looks away. Richie laughs at him because he doesn't take him seriously, he never does,

not that Eddie's giving him a reason too.

Richie puts in the one working earbud and plugs them into his phone. As he does this, Eddie thinks about all the quarters, dimes and nickels he'll have to scavenge for to replace them, then he thinks about the 10 minute walk it will take him to get to the convenience store, he even thinks about Terry, the store manager who always looks at him funny when he tosses the same pair of headphones onto the counter for the third time in a month. *Fuck Terry. And fuck Richie.*

Eddie's anger is unreasonable, he knows that, he should just take the earbuds back if it bothers him that much. But just looking at Richie right now makes him fucking sick. All he wants to do is beat the smirk off his face and make him feel bad about himself.

Eddie makes it a point to ignore Richie for most of the night, he only speaks to him when necessary. Richie barely even notices. When he struggles to carve out the shape of a mitochondria, Eddie takes the clay from him snappily and crafts it in under a minute.

"You're stupid," is all he says, Richie grins at him dumbly.

And when Richie asks to stay the night, Eddie surprises himself by saying,

"no," and again Richie doesn't take him seriously, so he follows up with, "I'm serious Richie."

Richie squints at him, "Wait, why?"

Eddie shrugs, "I don't feel good." it's not really a lie but it's not really the truth either.

"Oh," Richie says, he doesn't leave immediately, he sticks around to bug Eddie for a few extra minutes before he jumps out the window.

"Why don't you use the fucking door sometimes?" Eddie calls after him.

"This is more exciting," he responds from outside before he's gone.

It's not really a big deal that Richie picks up a broken pair of

headphones off the floor from time to time. Sure it bothers him a little when it's dark and he's horny and he doesn't want to chance his mom hearing moans coming from his laptop. But he always manages.

However, there are times when he can't be around Richie, times where he doesn't *want* to be around Richie. Sometimes the mere presence of Richie makes him mad and sad and nauseous and there's a reason behind it but he sure doesn't like to think about it.

Richie calls him his best friend and Eddie supposes that's true. He's the person Eddie spends the most time with and he's the one he itches to see when he has any sort news or a dumb video he wants someone to laugh at. But Eddie is pretty sure he's the worst best friend in the world, probably, and he blames it all on that stupid fucking reason.

A good example as to why he sucks, is his tendency to ignore Richie, sort of like what he's doing right now.

It's been two days since they've talked and there's a few unanswered texts on his phone. It isn't very hard to dodge him at school when Eddie knows Richie's routine like it's his own. If Richie's about to turn left, he turns right.

He skips lunch and hangs around the library, he pretends it's because he's got a research paper due.

He only gets half a paragraph down before he starts eyeing the vending machine in the corner. Giving in, he stands and makes his way over while digging around in his pockets for some change.

He stares through the glass, surveying his options, before he decides on a bag of cheetos. Without even realizing, he starts to think about how cheetos are Richie's favorite. He blinks away the mental image of Richie covered in cheeto dust, laughing at something stupid. Eddie slips some coins into the machine.

He watches the metal piece that hugs the bag uncurl, his cheetos fall and then someone grabs his shoulder. He jumps, startled, then looks over to find Bill behind him, his smile is faint.

"Rich is looking for you," he says softly.

"What's new?" Eddie retorts, he looks away and bends down to retrieve his cheetos. He doesn't wait for Bill before heading back to the table he's set up at. Bill follows him.

"Yeah," Bill says on the way over, Eddie sits down and unfastens the bag before he looks at Bill again. He observes the unreadable thoughts that take over Bill's face while shoving a cheeto into his mouth.

"You've been making him sweat recently," Bill starts after a moment of staring, "you know with all these mood swings."

Bill pulls out the chair across from Eddie and slumps down into it, he watches Eddie shrug and look down at his text book. Eddie picks up his pencil like he's going to write something but just holds it in his hand and skims over a passage, he doesn't pick up any of what it's said.

"I've never seen Richie sweat." Bill says, aiming to draw response, Eddie remains quiet. Bill sighs while Eddie reads over the paragraph again, and still, nothing.

Bill has a cleaning problem, you could say he's a neat freak, maybe that he has even a bit of ocd. And it's not just his room he likes to keep orderly, but his friendships as well. He has a thing for trying to clean up their messes and it leads to a lot of meddling. Eddie isn't quite sure why his own issues never seem to keep him satisfied.

"Richi-"

"You worried about something Bill?" Eddie's voice is abrupt and loud, he puts down his pencil and shoves away his history book. He stares up at Bill trying to keep his features hard.

"Of course I am. You think too much and he doesn't think at all. You're a horrible match." 'Match' Pfft. Eddie holds back an eye roll while Bill continues, "and you're always mad about something, but there never seems to be a problem."

"You're right, there isn't a problem. Haven't you ever thought that

maybe I just get sick of him? You of all people know how easy it is too."

Bill is watching him carefully now, with a thoughtful look on his face.

"Actually, I think there is a problem," he finally says.

"Yeah well I don't want to hear what you think." Eddie closes his text book, gathers his things, dumps them into his bag, and sulks off.

Stupid Bill. Stupid Richie. He wishes everyone would just leave him the fuck alone sometimes.

He's on day four of ignoring Richie and there really *isn't* a valid reason, so when Richie asks for one on day three, Eddie isn't sure what to say.

Richie was leaning against the locker next to Eddie's, staring at him, waiting for a reply. Eddie had whittled down most of his attention to switching out his books.

"You steal my shit and you're annoying. I just don't want to talk to you right now." Eddie had said, he pushed his locker shut and avoided looking Richie in the eye, he skimmed over his face only briefly, but long enough to know he wasn't smiling.

After that Eddie had sighed and walked away.

Now it's the next day and he rather not be thinking about Richie in gym shorts, but here he is, thinking about Richie in gym shorts.

Gym is the only class they have together and he's sitting on the sidelines. Richie's on the field, along with Stan and Mike and they're playing flag football. Stan has the ball and is moving as fast as his little twig legs can carry him when nowhere a body appears to his left and he's being slammed into the ground. It's Richie. Stan is lying on his back, wheezing, while Richie rips the ball from Stans flimsy arms and holds it up, he lets out a loud, "woooo!"

"Tozier!" Coach shouts from his place on the bleachers, "you idiot! Off the field now!" He stomps down the steps in a way so brawny that

Eddie can feel them shake from where he's sat.

Richie is laughing and smiling the whole time he makes his way over, Eddie hates him.

He doesn't listen to the coach's spiel about rules and how Richie never seems to follow them, he doesn't even look over again, instead he trains his gaze back towards the field and half expects Richie to come over to bug him. So when that doesn't happen he pushes down the feeling that it raises.

He attempts to casually side glance in Richie's direction, but finds Richie sitting on the same level as him, twenty feet away, already staring at him. The side glance gains confidence and Eddie stares back.

Richie isn't smiling anymore and Eddie can't help but think, *what's with that face?* He turns away and he's left with a new sort of ugly feeling that festers every time he thinks of way Richie was looking at him just then.

The rest of the period he spends doing everything he can to rid his body of that ugly feeling. When seventh period rolls around he meets Bill at their lab station and they match human bones with their functions quickly and efficiently. Bill challenges him to see who can get the most accurate in under three minutes. Bill wins.

They don't talk about Richie.

Richie isn't even mentioned until after 8th period when a girl called Cassie finds him in the parking lot and asks,

"Do you know where Rich is?"

"Last time I saw him he was in the downstairs bathroom doing coke." Eddie says impassively.

"What seriously!?" Cassie's eyes bug and her mouth hangs open.

"Yeah," he responds and walks off. Cassie's an idiot, known for her whore methods and ditzy attitude, also known to Eddie as another girl Richie sleeps with.

He doesn't like talking to those girls, or looking at them, or thinking of them.

He doesn't show up at Richie's place unannounced anymore because of the time he had walked in on him and Rosalina Walt. They hadn't been fucking the moment he opened the door but she was laying naked on Richie's chest and Richie had grinned up at him per usual, as if it were fine, as if Eddie's soul hadn't been detached and drug under the house, under a billion feet of dirt and into the pits of hell. Eddie hadn't expected it to hurt like that.

He supposes that's when Richie started leaving a sour taste in his mouth and the word hate in his head. Knowing it was happening and seeing it happening are two very different things.

Eddie walks home in a bad mood because now he's thinking about Cassie. And about Cassie with Richie. And about Richie fucking Cassie.

He doesn't mean to slam the door or draw his mother out of the living room but he does and she hobbles over, concern spread across her round face like butter. The sight of her worsens his mood. He hates that look she's giving him right now, the look she's always giving him, like he'll die at any second.

He fucking wishes.

"Eddie what's wrong sweetie?"

"Nothing," he replies coldly, he pushes past her and she almost loses her footing but grasps at a chair to regain her balance.

"Eddie!" she calls after him but he's already in his room and this time he doesn't care that the door closes with enough force to make the frame shutter. He drops his bag on the floor then drops his body in his bed. He doesn't want to think about the ugly feelings or all the selfishness he's given way too, or how mean he's been lately, how unfair. But he lets all of those things in. He mauls over them until they don't even make him feel anything anymore.

Then he reaches for his phone and sends a text he probably shouldn't

have.

'I need to see you.'

He doesn't bother explaining to his mom why there's a such a nice car parked outside their house, or who the boy sitting behind the wheel is, instead, he leaves without any explanation at all.

He climbs into the passenger seat and situates himself, the seat feels much to large for him.

"New car?" It's an obvious yes, but Eddie asks anyway.

"Yeah, you like it?" Tanner smiles a full set of white. Eddie shrugs.

"I liked the mercedes."

"She's still alive and well, Blue here was a birthday gift." Tanner shifts the car into drive and pulls away from the curb. "You'd met her sooner her if you came around more often."

"Yeah well, I got shit to do."

"Sure."

Eddie's sweating, and panting and trembling. He's sprawled out on Tanner's sofa, and Tanner's propped up next to him, naked. Eddie had managed to slip his boxers back on in fatigue, but Tanner didn't bother. They're in the movie room and some foreign film is playing in the background. Eddie glances over just in time to watch two men going at it.

"Back in my Mind," Tanner says, "It's French, and a classic in my book. It's about a young man who falls into a dark cycle of prostitution and his childhood friend who tries to rescue him. But some people don't want rescued."

"How deep," Eddie says sarcastically, just before their heavy moans blare through the speakers and fill the basement.

"It is, we should watch it for real sometime." Tanner replies, he picks up the remote and turns it down a little.

"When are your parents coming home?"

"Who knows, you scared they'll walk in?" Tanner says as he crawls over to Eddie on his hands and knees, Tanner cages Eddie beneath him. Then he lowers his body and rocks himself slow and hard against Eddie while bending down so his mouth is almost touching Eddie's ear. "They don't come down here," he whispers. Eddie shivers.

They kiss after that and Eddie's boxers end up back on the floor.

They leave spots on the sofa and Tanner is about to leave to call for a maid when Eddie stops him, his cheeks reddened and his jaw slackened. Tanner laughs at him and tells him where to find the cleaning supplies if it bothers him so much. And it does, so he fetches a small bucket of water, furniture cleaner and a rag.

He spends seven minutes scrubbing the sticky white marks out of the red velvet material that was probably imported from some country he's never heard of. He's pretty sure it wasn't even his cum.

"I love seeing you on your knees like that." Tanner says flopping down on his stomach and using elbows to prop himself up, he smirks.

"Shut up," Eddie snaps but there's no heat behind it, he gets to his feet and scurries off to return everything to its place. When he comes back, Tanner's sitting up, staring at the entry way as if he were waiting for him.

"You still hanging around that mutt?" he asks, only wearing a half smile now.

"Yepp," he says, plopping down next to him, Eddie nestles into his shoulder, resting his cheek against Tanner's now clothed chest.

"That's not what I hear." Tanner retorts, Eddie sinks into the vibrations of his words as they spread against his face.

"You keeping tabs on me?"

He feels Tanner shrug.

Eddie met Tanner a little over a year ago, Eddie was a sophomore

and Tanner was a junior. They shared a study hall and Tanner hadn't been shy when asking for a phone number. Tanner was filthy rich, handsome, smart and one of the most insecure people Eddie's ever met.

Tanner knows his assets, he knows he's good looking and charming but there's a self loathing set deep within him that makes him act a certain way sometimes.

And Eddie can see that, he thinks that may be why Tanner likes him so much.

"You still in love with him?"

And Tanner can see him too.

"God- fuck off," Eddie pushes away from him but Tanner grabs his arm and pulls him back. Eddie doesn't understand why he has to bring that up.

"Guess so," he says with his mouth against Eddie's head, the words muffle against his hair. Tanner wraps his arms around him and squeezes. "Why won't you be my boyfriend? I can make you forget about him."

Eddie doesn't respond. He likes Tanner, really, he does, but Tanner is Tanner. And though he may have good intentions and a decent heart, Eddie knows better, he knows who Tanner is.

"You're so cruel." Tanner whispers.

"If you want a boyfriend, I'm sure at least one of your boys would be thrilled to have full access to your private jet."

"Haha" Tanner's tone is ironic, he sighs, "that reminds me, my dad's got some business party he's forcing me to attend and these things are awful alone, be my date?"

"Why don't you just ask Martin Malioto?" Eddie drawls.

"Malioto? He doesn't clean up near as nice as you do."

"Yeah yeah, whatever, I'll think about it." Eddies mutters right before Tanner leans down to press a sloppy wet kiss against his cheek. "Hey, hey! What was that for?" Eddie spews, using his sleeve to wipe the spit off his face.

"You're just so darn cute!"

"You fucking weirdo." Eddie grumbles, Tanner just laughs.

When they wake up the next morning Eddie wills it to be Saturday instead of Thursday, but Tanner destroys his wishful thinking when he drags him out of bed and dresses him in something he normally would never wear. He's surprised to find the sleeves aren't too long and the pants are hemmed perfect to his height.

"Whose clothes are these?"

"Just extras for when I have friends stay over."

"Hmm."

They go down the main staircase and into a kitchen that's probably bigger than Eddie's entire house. A diner ready breakfast is laid out across the table for them, they eat it quickly before ushering out the door and into a different car than the one Eddie had ridden in yesterday.

When they pull up, Eddie prays that none of his friends are around. He hates the questions that follow when they see him with Tanner. Luckily he doesn't spot any of them.

He and Tanner part ways at the entrance and Eddie promises to return the clothes at some point. Tanner tells him not to worry about it.

The first half of the day is fine, then lunch happens.

He decides to eat in the cafeteria for the first time in almost a week. He stands in line with Beverly and they talk aimlessly about nothing until mashed potatoes are being slopped onto their plates. When they pay, Eddie takes the time to count out the exact change.

They are the last ones to make it to the table and when he looks, Richie has his arm on the back of Hannah Miller's chair. Eddie realizes he had picked a bad day to come back.

"Eddie!" Mike exclaims at the same time Ben says, "You're back!"

Eddie only smiles in return and takes a seat next to Bill. Bill nods him a 'hello' as he chews on his straw. Again, Eddie glances at Richie but he's talking to Hannah, he looks excited about something. Eddie hates him.

"Damn Eddie you're lookin fresh today," Mike says with a sly smile, "When did you start talking to Tanner again?"

He picked a really bad day to come back.

Eddie shrugs and stabs a straw through his milk carton.

"We're not really talking, we just hang out sometimes."

"Mmhmm," Mike hums, like he knows something.

"Is it true he has a golf course in his backyard?" Stan peeps, followed by Ben saying, "I heard he has a private jet and a boat almost as big as his house."

Eddie would rather not have this conversation right now but acting weird isn't going to do anything but make it even more awkward.

"It's not an entire golf course but yeah," Eddie takes a bite of corn but he almost spits it out, it tastes like shit. "And he *does* has a jet but the boat isn't near as big as his house."

"Wow- is his dad actually in the mafia?" Stan looks a little too interested in the rumors for Eddie's comfort, he wonders what else they've heard.

"Doubt it," he responds.

"That guy's a dick," Richie chimes in. Eddie looks over and they make eye contact for the first time in days.

"Well it's a good thing you never have to talk to him."

"Unless you guys get married," Beverly interjects.

"We're not getting married."

"Oh please get married, I want to ride in the jet." Stan muses, puffing out his bottom lip.

"Then why don't you marry him?" Eddie bites in response.

"Maybe I will!"

"You ever have sex in the jet?" Bill asks with a funny expression, Eddie gives him a look that conveys a clear, 'what the fuck.' He huffs and his gaze unintentionally floats back over to Richie, he's watching him.

Fuck, he thinks when he realizes everyone's waiting on an answer. Seriously? He guesses could lie and say he hasn't, but for what reason?

Fuck it.

"Yeah, and on the yacht and in the jacuzzi, we even fucked in a replica of the batmobile." Eddie says in a monotone voice while giving Bill a hard stare.

"Wait hold up- he has a replica of the batmobile!" Ben shouts, excitement brimming his entire face.

"Yepp," Eddie says, he's not sure what he's looking for when his eyes fall onto Richie, but he's frowning. His head droops slightly as his swirls his fork around in his half eaten meal. 'Good,' Eddie thinks, 'frown, be unhappy you stupid asshole.'

Richie catches him spying and Eddie doesn't look away, Richie's frown seems to deepen.

"What cha doin?" Beverly asks pulling up a chair and straddling it from behind, they're in English and Mr. Henson is the worst teacher he's ever had.

"Writing," Eddie says.

"About what?"

"A kleptomaniac who is blind."

"Oh," she says, looking unsure of what to say.

"Yeah," Eddie starts, "it's for creative writing project."

"Huh, well that is creative," she remarks before leaning forward to rest her chin on her arm, she doesn't say anything for a minute and Eddie doesn't make an attempt at conversation. "So..." she starts eventually, Eddie glances up, she's fidgeting with her fingers, "are you ever going to make up with Richie?"

It's a question Eddie expected, but not one he wants to answer.

"We're not fighting," he says.

"Really? Because it sure seems like you are."

"No, there's a difference between fighting and not talking. We're just not talking."

"But why?" Beverly pushes and Eddie isn't sure if she sounds more desperate or curious, in return Eddie shrugs and takes a moment to formulate a response.

"I don't know, I guess there isn't a reason." It is a lie, no matter how you look at it, but the reason is ugly and Eddie doesn't talk about it.

"Well that doesn't make any sense." Beverly's voice gains an edge and she starts to look like she's about to pout.

"Maybe I just don't like him anymore."

"What?!" she blurts, obtaining Eddie's attention.

"Shh," he hushes, not liking the eyes on them.

"That's stupid Eddie," she rations weakly, looking at him with something that resembles concern. But maybe it's not stupid, maybe

if Eddie continues to think bad about Richie, the rest will go away. Maybe he doesn't have to be trapped like this anymore. Maybe he doesn't have to keep feeling like this.

But he's ignoring something crucial, something swimming around his thoughts and hammering away in his chest.

He misses him.

He misses him so much, that he hates him.

Tanner isn't the only boy Eddie's fooled around with. There was Robby, who he met at the mall when he was in line buying a pretzel. Bronson, a college student who showed him around campus and took him to his first frat party. Dom, a 28 year old drummer who's in a band that no one knows the name of. And Kent, his first and only boyfriend.

So you could say Eddie's been around.

Sometimes he imagines his mother's reaction, the expression, the words and the gestures she would use upon finding out that her son likes being fucked senseless by men who have a slight resemblance to a certain curly headed someone. He knows she would die.

He doesn't like to talk about his sexual antics, not with Bill, not with Bev and definitely not with Richie. He almost gets a vibe that his gay sex life makes Richie's dick turn inside out. *Well fuck him and his heterosexual sex drive.* Eddie certainly doesn't want to hear about all the pussy he scores.

Tanner's the best fuck he's ever had, it's probably why he sticks around and calls him when he's lonely. And it's probably why he agreed to get all spiffed up in a borrowed tux and expensive shoes to go to this stupid dinner party.

He's adjusting his collar in the mirror when there's a tapping on his window.

His stomach flips and his chest explodes before he's even turned around. *Why now?* He hides his nervous streak behind the anger that settles in over the shitty timing.

When he looks, he finds Richie on the other side of the glass, peering in at him. He moves to unlock the window and lets Richie do the rest. He darts around his room making sure he's all put together while Richie slides the window up and shimmies through the frame.

When he's finally on his feet he stays where he is.

"Why you looking all fancy?" Richie questions and Eddie doesn't respond right away, instead, he straightens his bowtie and runs a few fingers through his hair.

"I'm going to a party," he says eventually.

"With Tanner?"

"Yeah," he replies, finally letting Richie take his attention, "what do you want?"

Richie frowns and Eddie recognizes that it's unusual to see so many frowns come from Richies lips over the span of a few days. Eddie tells himself he doesn't care.

"Do you like- hate me or something?"

Yes, he thinks.

"Yeah," he says. They stare at each other for a small second then Eddie checks the time on his phone.

"I can't even tell if you're kidding."

Eddie shrugs, he doesn't look up from his phone screen, it dings with a message from Tanner telling him he's on the way. He taps out a reply.

"Eddie what the fuck? Did I do something?" The huge dent in Richie's voice forces Eddie to look at him, he's never heard that before. He finds a lot of things on Richie's face that make him want to look away. He fights back another shrug.

"No- you just-" there is nothing he could say that would comfort Richie right now. He doesn't know what he wants to do. He wishes

Tanner would pull up already and rescue him.

It goes quiet again because really, Eddie is at a loss for words, at a loss for a decision. *What decision? The decision to end their friendship?* That's a dangerous thought.

Richie is staring, and Eddie is trying not to meet his eyes. His fingers start to twitch at his sides and he suddenly feels very overheated, he swallows.

He doesn't actually want to end their friendship, *right?* Having Richie like this should be enough for him, so what the hell is he doing? What is all this loathing leading to?

"Eds, I don't- I'm really confused here." Richie sounds so small, his tall lanky frame doing nothing for him at the moment, he almost looks like a little kid, lost and scared and...Oh, there it is, it's abrupt and immediate and hits Eddie right between the ribs and it's bad, worse than the hating and worse than the ugly.

He starts feeling sick and the back of his neck itches. He swallows again.

"Yeah," he's still so unsure of what to say so he looks at the ground and stalls, "I- I have to go, we can talk about it later."

Richie doesn't say anything and Eddie doesn't move, it's silent and nothing is happening. After an extensive amount of staring, Richie finally goes for the window, he hops out without another word and doesn't bother to shut it behind him.

Eddie feels miserable.

And he still feels miserable while standing on a floor he can see his reflection in with an arm linked into Tanners.

Eddie quickly earns how acustom Tanner is to these sorts of things, he knows exactly what to say and when to say it, he knows how to smile, how to laugh and when it's time, how to transition into goodbye. Eddie barely has too talk.

He thinks he's been introduced more times tonight than he has been

over the course of his entire life. It's endless. He follows Tanner's family as they migrate around the floor like a flock of birds, dropping a twig here, picking one up there. Most of the night Eddie watches in awe, wondering how all these people can seem so structured, so doll like. He almost feels like he's in a movie.

By the time dinner is being served he needs a nap. The table seems to be about 1,000 feet long and how they managed to cram so many people into one room is beyond the realms of physics.

Tanner sits next to him and unwraps his silverware. Eddie is almost afraid to touch his in fear of looking like an average citizen. He studies Tanner carefully, and realizes that everything seems to be pretty standard. Still, he mimics Tanners actions and before he registers it, a plate of food is placed in front of him.

Tanner leans in closer to him right before he's about to take a bite of something he's never even heard of.

"How do you like it?"

Eddie lowers his fork, "it's awful, I could never be rich," he says bluntly, looking at Tanner in all honesty. Tanner laughs, it's amble and deep and reminds Eddie of the color purple.

"I know, and they say the rich have it easy," he jokes, Eddie smiles at that and dinner continues.

After what seems like an eternity, the party seems to be nearing its end. By now, Eddie should have tucked his encounter with Richie somewhere deep and dark where it can't bother him, but the memories still have yet to cease from visiting him at random moments. It depresses him, far more than any of these rich people could.

"I know you're over it and probably want to die right now but there is one more person I have to introduce you to." Tanner whispers in his ear just when he thinks he's homefree. The exit is so so close.

"Tanner!" an old women exclaims approaching them, Tanner drags him away from the doors to meet her.

"Grandma!" Tanner leers, matching her enthusiasm.

"And who is this?" she smiles warmly at Eddie who can't help but eye the giant pearls wrapping around her neck.

"This is Eddie, my boyfriend."

Eddie almost flinches at the use of the word boyfriend, instead, he does his best to give her a genuine smile. Tanner's grandma accepts it and takes one of his hands between the two of hers.

"Oh he's so handsome, Tanner." she says gazing up into Eddies face, he tries to snuff out any awkward quirks his features may be giving away. "You better treat my grandson right, you hear?"

"Oh of course," Eddie affirms in the most convincing way he can, he tries out another smile and hopes for the best.

Tanner exchanges a few more words with her and then they leave.

"So do you think anyone would have guessed my family income is under sixty grand a year?" Eddie asks laying on his stomach across Tanners california king. He watches Tanner undo his tie and shrug off his jacket.

"No way, you actually did really well," Tanner assures, "way better than Martin Malioto ever could."

"That's comforting."

There's a silence while Tanner strips down to his underwear. He turns around and finds Eddie staring, a smirk unfurls his lips and he crawls onto the bed eventually mounting Eddie's back. He bends down and presses their cheeks together. Eddie's breathing deepens.

Then in a seductive voice he says, "Only sixty G's a year, huh?"

Eddie scowls and face plants the bed.

"You're a fucking dick." he says but it's lost in the comforter.

"You really hurt Richie's feelings." Bill hasn't talked about the

situation since that day in the library, and after what had happened the night of the dinner party, it doesn't surprise Eddie that the topic is brought up.

As of now they were sitting on Bill's back patio working on a anatomy packet that was due yesterday.

Eddie doesn't reply and Bill's sigh is more frustrated than Eddie's ever heard it.

"He's really unhappy right now Eddie, I think he's scared."

Eddie still doesn't say anything and he doesn't know what he's expecting happen but he allows his silence to build onto Bill's agitation until it's tittering on the line of something more foul.

"He hasn't done anything to you! It isn't his fault you feel the way you do."

And there it is.

Bill almost shouts it, making the decision to cross *that* line. Eddie stands. He's shorter than Bill but his fury seems to give him a few inches, his fingers shift into crescents against his palms and he squeezes.

"And how exactly do I feel Bill?" Eddie seethes, knocking Bill's anger right out of him, Bill starts to look a bit contrite. His mouth opens but he doesn't dare say anything, not when Eddie's looking at him like that.

"You can't fix it Bill, so let it be." Eddie says darkly through his teeth.

Bill backs down.

He goes too a movie with Ben a couple nights later and he's thankful when Richie's name comes no where near either of their lips.

"The potatoes tasted like mashed up cardboard and the gravy definitely had cat piss in it." Ben jabbers, he's nearing the end of his blurb about the worst thanksgiving meal he's ever had and Eddie's kept his smile the whole time.

By the time Ben is finished, their food arrives and Eddie starts stuffing his face immediately.

"Damn is your mom starving you or something, you're going to choke."

"I mean she consumes everything in her general vicinity and that usually leaves me, her twig of a son, dying of hunger."

"Never thought I'd relate to your mom."

Eddie laughs and they filter in and out of conversations between eating. When the waitress leaves the tab she smiles at Ben a little longer than she had at Eddie.

"I think she likes you." Eddie smirks.

"Uh she's definitely forty." Ben retorts and Eddie laughs in response, they get up to pay.

While standing at the cash register, Eddie hears a familiar voice.

"Eddie, hey!"

When he turns around it's Dom, the 28 year old drummer he had a three night stand with a little over six months ago. Surprise takes Eddie's words and then takes them again when Dom's arms encircle around him, lingering a little to long to be friendly.

"Dom wow, when did you get back in town?" Eddie finally manages, ignoring the way Ben is looking at them.

"Just a few nights ago. You still have my number right?

"Course," Eddie responds.

"Great! Text me sometime, we'll have to hang out soon." Dom grins, he raises a hand and runs it through Eddie's hair then says,

"bye Edwardo, bye Edwardo's friend." Dom waves at them, then wanders back over to where he came from.

Once they've payed and stepped outside Ben asks,

"What the fuck was that?"

"He's just some guy I used to know." Eddie says a little curt. By now night has taken the sky and it blows chilled air against Eddie's cheeks, turning them pink.

"Okay but he was like thirty," Ben says as if he's waiting to be corrected.

"No—" Eddie jumps, he goes to say 25 because at least that seems a little better but he hesitates then feels weird, eventually the part of his brain that operates his mind to mouth filter deceives him. "28"

"Oh like that's any better. What the fuck Eddie."

"Hey, it's no ones business who I talk to." Eddie defends.

"It is when they're old and creepy."

"He isn't creepy, Dom's actually cool."

"Um Eddie, you're 17, it's fucking creepy."

"He thinks I'm 19,"

"Well you look 13 so I'm pretty sure he knows that's a lie."

Eddie shakes his head.

"I really don't want to be having this conversation with you."

"Fine." Ben says flatly and it ends.

It's not that Eddie thinks Ben is wrong, age *is* a tricky subject, but Dom has never pressured him into anything or has been anything other than respectful. And sometimes Eddie has a hard time controlling his hoe urdges.

When he met Dom it just so happened to be at a time where Eddie needed him. And he just so happened to be 28.

Besides Eddie can handle himself.

Eddie has a dream that Richie is holding him.

Richie's long body curls against Eddie's and Richie's scent is everywhere, it's on the pillows, the blankets, his clothes, his hair, him. Eddie feels like he's suffocating in him.

Eddie entwines himself across Richie's chest and finds solace in the way he moves up and down with Richie's every breath. His heart is beating slow enough to put Eddie to sleep, but he doesn't want to close his eyes, he doesn't want it to end.

Richie runs a large hand up Eddie's spine, making him shutter, Eddie nudges his head against Richie's chin and he feels a smile press into his forehead. Everything is light and airy and Eddie's chest is fluttering. In that moment there is an unspoken promise that Richie will not let go of him.

"Hey," Richies voice is silk in Eddie's ears and the warmth of his breath is stunning against his skin. "Why are you crying," he whispers so faintly, Eddie hadn't even realized, but then he feels the wetness on his cheeks and- why is he crying, how could he be crying when he feels like *this*?

"I don't know, but I-" Eddie knows what he wants to say but he can't continue. He lifts his head to look at Richie's face, in return Richie gives him a watery smile that gives way to a type of sadness Eddie doesn't want to think about.

"It's okay to sleep," Richie murmurs and with that, Eddie sleeps.

It's then he wakes up to find that he's in his own bed, alone, and that hurts, probably more than it should.

There's a lot of something pent up under his lungs and he isn't sure if he's in need of a good cry or a enraged scream. Neither come to him.

He hasn't spoken to Bill much since that day on the porch, and Ben hasn't said a lot either. Actually, when he thinks about it, no one seems to really be around much. Well, around him.

But that's his own fault.

And that's okay, he tells himself.

Just avoid and ignore.

Anyways, he has Tanner, who's always at arms reach, and Dom, who he hung out with a few nights ago. It had been fun, despite some stale thoughts centering around Ben saying 'he's old and creepy.' He *isn't*.

During gym, Eddie sits out and watches a basketball dribble from person to person. Instead of watching Richie, he focuses on Tanner. Tanner's lean and more muscular than Richie, he's got shorter hair and model ready teeth. He's poster boy perfect. Yet when Tanner moves closer to Richie so does Eddie's attention and then he's back at square one, staring at Richie.

It starts to make his heart hurt, watching him move like that, with determination scrunched in his features and strategy in his movements. Eddie doesn't even notice Tanner has the ball before Richie steals it out from under his reach. Eddie watches the dirty move Tanner ignites when he catches Richie's calf with his foot and takes him to the floor. Richie falls hard and fast, but he's back on his feet even faster, expression even harder.

His chest puffs out and he looks fucking pissed, it's not a look he wears casually so Eddie finds that it's impossible to look away. Richie says something and then Tanner says something and then Richie's decking Tanner across the face. Tanner recovers with enough time to tackle Richie to the ground, there's a loud thud and the sound of squeaking shoes against the floor. Eddie hadn't even realized he'd been standing until the coach broke it up and the commotion died down.

Coach grips Tanner's forearm in one hand, Richie's in the other and with fury printed across his forehead he escorts both boys out of the gym. Tanner makes eye contact with him, Richie doesn't

What the fuck?

A couple periods later and after spamming Tanner with texts he finally receives a response.

He finds Tanner near the boys bathroom on the second floor.

"What the fuck was that?"

"Dude's a fucking prick, you saw him hit me." Tanner says coldly, he raises the tips of his fingers to the side of his jaw where the ghost of Richie's fist is.

"Yeah after you tripped him."

Tanner looks at him a little surprised before it's replaced with indigidence.

"You're defending him?"

That really hadn't been Eddie's intention but he'd seen exactly what had happened.

"No, but if you're going to trip someone you could at least prepare for a retaliation," Eddie reasons. Tanner's eyebrows pull together and now there's a sourness in the creases of his face.

"He didn't punch me because I tripped him, he punched me because—" Tanner starts quickly in a rage that's only simmering, but he suddenly cuts himself off.

"What?" Eddie presses, curious now.

"Doesn't matter," Tanner shuts down and Eddie sulks.

"You can't just leave me hanging."

"I said it doesn't matter." Tanner says firmly, his eyes are stoney as he peers into Eddie's, almost like he's looking for something. Eddie instantly feels annoyed.

"Fine, I'll just ask Richie." he baits and for a moment, he waits for Tanner to take it, but the frigid expression he wears only grows colder and his jaw starts to look shaper. He doesn't take the bait,

instead he throws it back into Eddie's face.

"Go ahead, ask away, but just know he's *never* going to love you" Tanner says wildly with no purpose other than to hurt Eddie. And now they're on a whole other level, Tanner just took it there, when he *knows* not too.

"Right, just like you should know that I'm *never* going to love you and I'm *never* going to be your fucking boyfriend and that I've got a hundred and one different po go sticks on speed dial so you can go fuck all because. Fuck. You." Eddie sounds nasty down to the last word and Tanner looks like he's on the brim of mania, his teeth grit together and he balls his fists so tight they're almost white. Eddie half expected to be hit, instead, Tanner lets it out on the locker behind him. When his fist connects with the metal it's loud and it makes a dent and after, he leaves.

Eddie is left alone with his ugly feelings and his ugly thoughts and a whole lot of anger he isn't sure how to get rid of.

He texted Dom something about being lonely and Dom had replied within seconds with words of comfort and a promise to keep him company.

That's how he ended up here, in a sleazy bar, with an arm draped over Dom's shoulder, more wasted than he's been in a long time.

And it worked too, the alcohol. It took away the ugly and replaced it with giggles and stupid thoughts about nothing.

After his quarrel with Tanner, he was left feeling so bad it was almost numbing, until it wasn't, until those ugly ugly feelings took over. He erases them with substance.

It's a little hazy between his ears but he can still recognize that Dom is looking good tonight, really good. And Eddie is all over him, they're kissing and groping and none of this is at all Eddie. He doesn't do PDA.

He takes one more shot before Dom's whispering in his ear,

"Let's get out of here."

Eddie's only been drunk four times. The first time was the summer before high school when Richie had been invited to some 18 year olds birthday party. He had brought Eddie and together they had gotten shitfaced. Eddie threw up in some bushes, Richie threw up in their tent. He doesn't like to think about it.

All the other times were at lame house parties Eddie didn't want to be at. Alcohol made them bearable, sometimes even a little fun.

He's never had drunk sex before, so it's a new experience. Dom's a little sloppy but Eddie's feeling like he's on fire, in the best way possible. So he lets his mouth hang open like a dog and Dom doesn't take it easy.

When it's over, they do it again.

And after, Eddie's too worn out to even think. He picks up his phone and it takes him a minute to get it unlocked but when does he notes that the screen looks like it's waving at him, it makes him laugh. Next to him, Dom scoots in closer, resting his chin on Eddie's shoulder.

"What're doing?" his voice is gruff and tired.

"I gotta text my friend and tell him he fucking sucks." Eddie explains fitting a laugh in somewhere.

"You sure that's a good idea?"

"Nope," Eddie's smiles.

The next morning his head feels like someone mistook it for a pinata and beat it a couple billion times with a metal baseball bat. His mouth feels hot and sticky and his breath smells like dead animals.

Slowly he throws his legs over the side of the bed and rises to his feet, that was a mistake. He finds a trashcan to his left, quickly grabs it and retches up all the leftover vodka that's been sitting in his stomach. After that he feels better.

He looks over and Dom's still passed out on the other side of the bed. He takes a quick glance over the room and realizes they're actually in a hotel, but where? He searches for his phone and finds it under

Dom's hip, when he looks down at the bright screen his head screams at him to look away.

He ignores the brain cells his mind is currently mourning and checks his location. They're just in town, *thank god* he thinks, grateful that his drunk escapades didn't wind him up in Mexico.

He switches off his phone, unable to bare looking at it any longer, then crawls over to Dom and shakes him awake.

Dom pays for his cab ride home and by then it had been a few hours and a couple advil later.

When he thinks of last night, pieces are missing, he remembers feeling good, really good. And he remembers Dom feeling good against him. He remembers the bar and a few of Dom's friends, he remembers laughing at his phone and- oh.

He quickly takes his phone out and checks his messages. He had sent over twenty last night, and they were all to Richie. *Fuck*

'Just wanted to liet youi now i hate yyou"

'you fuckinng suck'

'Youre the woarst person ive mnet.

'I HATE YOIU'

'*Great*' he thinks feeling heat in his cheeks and embarrassment everywhere else.

When he walks through the front door, his mother is already screaming.

"Edward Kaspbrak! You're grounded for the rest of your damn life!"

She forces him into the living room, smells him and blows up again.

"No son of mine is going to be an alcoholic!" She goes on and on and on for what seems like days. Eddie's headache is back and he wishes he would have just choked on his own vomit and died.

When she's done, she's reduced to tears and Eddie leaves her alone to cry.

He slams his bedroom door behind him, throws his jacket on the floor and hurls his phone onto his bed.

A second later, in his peripheral vision he catches something moving and when he glances over he finds a man sitting at his desk.

Not just any man, but Richie.

The first thought to come to mind is why had he not locked his window? The second is *fuck*.

Richie's staring at him. A third thought surfaces, *he looks kind of pissed*.

"Eventful night, huh?" Richie's tone scrapes Eddie's insides. He walks over and sits on the brink of his bed. Knowing he looks like shit, he avoids meeting Richie's gaze.

"Not really," he says, the hardness he expects to be there, isn't.

"Well you sent me about fifty different drunk texts about how much you hate me." Richie doesn't sound like Richie, he sounds crossed and stung and dejected, all at the same time, and at the moment it's a bit of an overload for Eddie.

"I'm aware." Eddie replies. There's a moment of nothing, like Richie is waiting for Eddie to explain himself. Eddie doesn't do that.

"Well—" Richie starts, anger seems to wipe out the hurt along with everything else. Eddie is not used to the way he's being looked at. "What the fuck?"

Eddie knows that's not really what Richie meant to say but his eyes crinkle in frustration and his hands squeeze into balls as they lay in his lap. Eddie makes no attempt to elaborate and the growing tension makes him squirm, it's starting to feel unbearable, being in this room.

"Are we friends?" Richie fits a small pause in before he continues, "Or are you going to end this over- nothing- over no reason at all."

"There is a reason." Eddie's responds immediately, and that is not a lie because there is a big, stupid, ugly reason. And Eddie still doesn't know what he wants.

"Yeah? Well what is it?" Richie snorts, looking at him in repugnance. There is a long silence, mostly because Eddie has no idea what to say.

They sit in the quiet for what feels like an hour.

"I- I don't like to talk about it." It comes out in a hush, almost qualifying as a whisper. Eddie hears the chair moving across the carpet, he looks over to see Richie standing. He looks dangerous.

"You don't like to talk about it? Well I don't like how your fucking treating me! You're being such a dick, I don't even- I don't know what to think." Richie thunders, his voice is somber and his face is hard, there's a pause before he continues. "It's because of Tanner right? He doesn't like me and you rather have him than me."

Oh. Is that what he's been thinking?

"It doesn't have anything to do with Tanner." Eddie protests, there's a lot of things going on inside him right now as he stares at Richie who's looking like *that*. It's doing something to him.

"No? So is it one of those other losers you fuck around with? Yeah, I know about them, I know what a fucking whore you are, letting all those guys-" Richie doesn't have the chance to finish because Eddie lurches across the room and slaps him so hard that it makes his hand sting.

He puts both palms flat on Richie's chest and he shoves.

He hates him.

"That's fucking gold coming from you." Eddie sneers, fuck Richie. Fuck him and his stupid fucking hypocrisy.

He hates him.

He shoves him again, and again, and then Richie is backed up into a wall and Eddie is not looking at his face.

"Eddie," Richie says but it doesn't sound angry anymore. Eddie's hands haven't moved from Richie's chest, he clenches them into fists and wishes he could pound Richie into another dimension.

"I hate you. I fucking hate you." Eddie says, but it doesn't sound hateful at all, he sounds breathless and frail. It makes him sick. And he doesn't know when Richie's hands circled around his wrists, but they're there, Richie squeezes.

"Why are you crying?" Richie whispers and Eddie hadn't even realized. How humiliating.

There's a tremor in every limb, and he is consumed by the ugliest side of every thought he has. Everything in him tells him to lean into Richie and wrap those arms around himself until he stops thinking about it.

"I'm sorry," Richie murmurs and if there was a hole in Eddie's tear tank before it's grown into a creator now, his eyes blur and he doesn't know how to make it stop.

They stay like this for some time, Eddie looking at the floor, Richie holding onto his wrists, everything so quiet, and it isn't until the top of Eddie's head accidentally brushes against Richie's sternum that something happens. Richie pulls him in.

He embraces him strong and firm and Eddie hates him.

He cries some more and Richie's shoulder dampens. Minutes pass, then hours, weeks, months, years and he finds himself thinking about something he shouldn't. Something that makes his heart pound and his head spin.

What he really needs is to stop thinking. So he focuses on his breathing, then on Richie's, he tries to sync their breathes, tries to feel connected to Richie. He is completely level headed when he pushes out of Richie's grasp, and when his red blotchy eyes meet Richie's cloudy brown ones.

"I-I" 'fucking hell, stop thinking' he repeats.

He tilts his head upward and he kisses Richie.

It's short and stupid and costly. Eddie doesn't want to open his eyes but when he does, he finds Richie looking down at him, stunned.

"I- Oh," Richie musters, his body is unmoving and his expression hasn't changed.

"Yeah," Eddie follows, he drops his hands to his sides and steps back. "I'm sorry."

"It's okay," Richie says, finally shaken from his trance. Awkwardly, he looks away from Eddie and lets his gaze flit around the room, looking at nothing in particular. The silence is thick and heavy and Eddie wants to fucking die. "Is- is that the reason?" Richie asks eventually.

"Yeah," Eddie repeats, he turns his back to Richie and moves to sit on the bed.

"Sorry I'm just-" Richie cuts himself off, he isn't sure what to say.

"Disgusted?" Eddie guesses. Richie looks at him funny.

"No- surprised."

"Is it really that surprising?" Eddie says anxiously.

"I mean- you're not a very affectionate person." Richie side eyes the floor and scratches the back of his neck. Eddie doesn't think he's ever seen him looking so- embarrassed.

Eddie replies with a shrug.

Richie's phone dings, he's quick to pull it from his pocket and swipe it open. Eddie takes his own phone from where he'd thrown it earlier and fumbles around with it. When he unlocks it the screen reminds him of all his drunk mistakes. He doesn't have time to think about it before Richie says,

"I actually gotta go," and he's already inching towards the window. He doesn't ask why.

"Okay," Eddie says and he must look a certain way because Richie jumps to say,

"I'll be back though, we're going to talk about this."

Oh boy, Eddie thinks but he doesn't say anything more. Richie disappears out the window.

That went exactly how Eddie expected it too.

The next day he doesn't hear from Richie and the day after that he gets dressed and ready for school.

There's a lot he's allowed himself to acknowledge, to feel, and there's a lot he has chosen to ignore. But the thing is, the world never imploded. Eddie is still alive, sure, his ribs might be a little crushed in and his heart may beat kind of funny at times, but he's okay, and he deals with it. Richie knows now and he didn't throw up in his mouth or punch him into next Tuesday- not that Eddie really expected those things- he had only been uncomfortable.

The walk to school seems like it takes much longer than usual and he pays little attention to the cars driving past him and his neighbours who are out on their morning jogs, instead, he thinks about where his friendship with Richie lies. If they stay friends their dynamic will definitely shift, he'll have to be more careful about their shoulders touching, and he'll have to keep his staring habits in check, he'll have to stop fantasizing and he'll have to sleep on the floor.

Thinking about it sucks.

First, second and third period go by and then they're in gym where he doesn't look at Richie once.

At lunch he stays in the library and half expects at least one of his friends to visit.

No one does.

By the end of the day he feels a little worse than he had this morning. He hasn't spoken to anyone for the entire day.

But when he opens his locker, he finds three new pairs of earbuds shoved underneath his math book. His heart stalls a little and a moment comes and goes where he hasn't moved at all.

"Hi," Richie says to the left of him, it thaws him, and he takes his time putting his stuff away. After, he grabs one of the pairs of earbuds and shoves them into his pocket.

"Hi," Eddie says eventually, forcing himself to turn to Richie and tilt his gaze upwards.

"I'll drive you home."

In Richie's truck, Eddie lets himself breathe. The music is uncharacteristically low, so much so that even the engine's reverberate over powers it. Still, that doesn't stop Richie from rhythmically drumming his thumbs against the steering wheel.

Eddie is about to lift a hand to turn it up but Richie starts talking.

"I'm sorry I haven't come to you sooner," he sounds remorseful.

"It's okay." Eddie says, hating the way he sounds.

"No- I've just been- I don't know, I'm still confused," Richie stammers. Eddie breathes deeply, and feels his heart ricocheting against his ribs.

"Look Richie, if you're confused about still wanting to be around me- it's okay, you don't have to make yourself uncomfortable-"

"Wait wait- hold on, Eddie- that's not what I'm confused about. Of course I want you in my life." Richie says this like it's obvious, it helps soothe the heart attack that's threatening Eddie's extinction. But now he's a bit puzzled.

"Then what are you confused about?"

Richie doesn't answer right away and when he does, it's slow.

"You, Eds, I'm confused about *how* I want you in my life."

Now Eddie is really confused, and he's sweating, *what in the hell does that mean?*

"What?" he deadpans like he's misreading what Richie's trying to say. He hadn't even realized Richie wasn't driving any more, they were

parked on the curb outside his house. Richie was facing him, watching him with the most genuine tint to his eyes that Eddie had ever seen.

"Eddie I-"

"But Richie you're straight!" Eddie explodes, but it's not an angry explosion, just a flustered one.

"Hey! I don't know that- I've never really thought about it before- I mean I have, but not *really*." Richie wears an expression that Eddie doesn't know how to read, he's looking distraught, muddled, maybe even a little scared.

"if you're fucking with me-"

"Eddie I swear to you. I would never play with you like that." Richie vows, and the sincerity is there, it's in his voice and in his face. Eddie doesn't have any other choice but to believe him.

"But you aren't sure." Eddie says softly.

There's a long silence.

"No."

"How long have you liked me like that." Richie asks curiously and Eddie has to look at him to make sure he's not being made fun of. He isn't.

They've been sitting in Eddie's room for a while now, just talking. Richie is laying on one end of the bed, Eddie on the other. He hopelessly tries to push off the satisfaction he feels just having Richie in his bed again.

"I don't know, probably since elementary," he replies casually.

"What! And you never told me?" Richie's shock is authentic, his mouth opens wide and his eyes bug slightly.

"Of course not, you did just ignore me for two days."

"You ignored me for an entire month!" Richie fires back, flinging his arms out in front of him.

After a minute Eddie says, "Okay, you got me there." then he gives a faint smile, for a second Richie smiles back, but it doesn't last.

"What was that all about anyways?"

Eddie doesn't really want to answer that, so he stays quiet, hoping Richie would somehow lose the memory of asking. When the silence isn't filled by another question, Eddie sighs.

"I don't really know, I mean I guess it kind of started to mess with me." Eddie squirms a little, "So I started trying to convince myself I hated you instead." He hangs his head, staring down into his lap, "I'm sorry, it wasn't fair to you."

"I forgive you." Richie says, he moves closer to put a hand on Eddie's back, he runs it up and down. Eddie shivers and leans into the touch. "I really thought you just didn't like me anymore." Eddie feels bad thinking about the broken looks and the half mended sentences Richie had given him. "Who knew it was all because you found me irresistible."

Suddenly he didn't feel bad anymore.

"You're a dick," Eddie said but it wasn't mean, he elbowed Richie in the side.

The next day at school everyone is overjoyed when Eddie sits with them at lunch, even more so when he sits next to Richie.

"Thank fucking god, this whole 'I hate Richie' thing was really starting to get on my nerves." Beverly discloses as she swings her spoon around in the air.

"Same," Richie smirks.

"So what happened?" Bill asks.

"This one here just professed his undying love for me, isn't that right Eds?" Richie jests smiling sloppily in Eddie's direction, Eddie kicks

him under the table and slits his eyes, he glares at Richie, hard.

"Eddie wouldn't fuck you if you were the last man alive, my dude has too much pride for that." Mike winks at him. Eddie wishes he were right.

The course of conversation takes a turn somewhere, but Eddie had stopped listening a good while ago, he stares at his trey, trying to ignore the peculiar way Bill has been looking at him and the way Richie is acting so normal.

There is a chance. There is a chance that everything Eddie thought was not possible, might be possible. There is a chance Richie might hold him one day, kiss him too, maybe even fuck him.

Key word; might.

And he almost hates Richie again, for giving him that. For giving him hope, and the possibility of turning around and smashing it all to nothing, all because he wasn't sure. So now Eddie isn't sure. He isn't sure how serious Richie is taking this, because Richie isn't a serious guy, and Eddie is having serious feelings.

He looks over and the same old Richie smile is there to greet him. His glasses hide the happy crinkles that form under his eyes and his cheeks are rosy.

Eddie loves him.

They've been hanging out every day, talking like they used to, laughing too. Eddie hadn't realized how much Richie's presence impacted his mood daily, he's felt so much better. But they still hadn't talked about *it*, not since that day Richie drove him home.

"So I buy my soda and my twix then I walk outside and right there sitting on the curb is Miss. Henry, and she, is, sobbing." Richie has always been an animated storyteller, in this instance it is no different. "I go and sit next to her, I don't say anything, just silently offer her half of my twix bar. She takes it and stops crying long enough to eat it, after, she starts crying again. I finally ask "why are you crying?" and she responds with "I just fucked up my diet," and I couldn't

Richie starts laughing as he recalls the memory. "I laughed pretty fucking hard and hoped she didn't think I was making fun of her, but then she started laughing too."

Eddie smiles.

"She goes on to tell me that her fiance just dropped her on that very curb, right after he took her ring back and told her he fucked her sister."

"Holy shit, poor Miss. Henry."

"I know."

"And to believe she confided in you, she must have really been a wreck."

"Hey fuck you."

Eddie almost responds with 'you wish' but he doesn't because things are different now and he still doesn't know what's going on in Richie's head. But he's losing hope fairly quick.

And it's okay, because he's come to realize he doesn't need that from Richie, he just needs Richie.

"I see you're hanging around the mutt again." Tanner says sneaking up behind Eddie. He had been headed towards the office to drop off a form.

"What can I say, I'm a dog person." Eddie says nonchalantly, keeping his eyes trained forward.

"Yeah? So what did he do? Suck your dick? Because I can do it better." Tanner leans in close to Eddie's cheek and drops his voice when he says that last part. Eddie side steps away from him.

"I told him." Eddie says continuing his casualty, Tanners stops walking and Eddie almost does too, but he doesn't, and Tanner has to sprint to catch up with him. Back at his side he says,

"No fucking way," a second later he adds, "What happened?"

"I sent him a bunch of drunk texts telling him I hated him, he got mad, showed up at my house, events occurred and I kissed him." Eddie says in one breath.

"Fuck, and after that?"

"He told me...there's a chance he might like me too." Just saying it makes his heart beat faster. "But that was over a week ago and he still hasn't gotten back to me about it."

They're standing in front of the office now. Tanner stares at him, looking like he wants to say something.

"Eddie- you're a smart guy so I don't get why you're so oblivious."

"What?" Eddie snaps a little confused and defensive.

"I could have told you Richie was into you."

There's a beat of silence, "What?" his defensiveness is overpowered by confusion.

"Why do you think he hates me so much? It's the same reason I hate him." Tanner states it like it's obvious. "And I don't care what they say, a straight boy would never act like that with you."

"Have you always thought this?"

"I mean yeah, but I wasn't 100% sure until he punched me."

"Wha-"

"I made a joke about fucking you."

"Thanks."

"Hey, it probably made him think, you *should* be thanking me." The corner of Tanner's lip quirks up.

"Why didn't you ever tell me?"

"Don't be so obtuse, Eddie. I clearly didn't want to lose my favorite booty call."

Eddie rolls his eyes and crosses his arms, he doesn't register that he's pouting until Tanner leans in and grabs his bottom lip between his teeth. Eddie jerks his head back.

"Stop pouting, Eddo, I'm the one who should be pouting." Tanner's tone twists and Eddie isn't sure if he's detecting something sorrow or if he's making it up. Tanner smiles, it's thin and watery and he says, "I'm gonna miss you."

Eddie's chest aches for a moment and all his harsh edges soften. He glances around seeing how alone they are before he steps into Tanners chest. Tanner holds him there for a long time. He starts running his hands up and down Eddie's back then settles them on his ass.

"But I'm gonna miss this ass most of all," he says as he squeezes, Eddie pushes out of his grip.

"You suck," he grumbles but he's smiling faintly.

Eddie doesn't notice that Tanner keeps looking beyond his shoulder until the third time he does it. When he goes to look, Tanner kisses him before he has the chance and Eddie lets it happen. He makes a mental list of everything Tanner tastes like, mint, pepper and lemon. It's a strange combination, it makes him wonder what Richie tastes like. *Richie*.

He pulls away.

"A week you said? Well, I figured I'd speed up the process, your welcome." Tanner says patting his head, he kisses Eddie's cheek for the last time and starts to walk away. "See you around Eddo."

Eddie watches him go and pretends he feels nothing. He doesn't understand what Tanner meant by 'speeding up the process,' not until he turns around to resume his original task and finds Richie at the end of the hallway, staring at him. He doesn't look happy. *Tanner you fucking asshole*.

Richie doesn't talk to him for the rest of the day and Eddie doesn't approach him. *Great here we go again.*

And shamefully, Eddie can't stop thinking about what Tanner had said. If Richie's upset with him for kissing Tanner does that mean it's true? He thinks about the possibility that maybe it's just because Richie hates Tanner, but that doesn't make sense, Eddie's been messing around with Tanner for a long time and it's never made Richie angry. And didn't Tanner say the only reason Richie even hates him is because of Eddie? Why is this so complicated?

He's laying in his bed thinking of his two options, text Richie or masturbate to the idea of Richie fucking him.

He texts him.

'Hey' is all he says, it makes him feel kind of stupid because that is not how they text. He feels even more stupid when Richie leaves him on read. *Asshole.*

Eddie tosses his phone on his bedside table and settles for option two, he slips a hand beneath the hem of his boxers.

He rather not have Richie's silent treatment continue on, and after receiving no indication of forgiveness the next day at school, he has no choice but to take matters into his own hands.

(Eddie had even sat next to him at lunch acting like nothing happened, Richie didn't even glance at him)

It's creeping up on 11pm by the time he escapes through his window, he doesn't make it to the ground as graceful as Richie being that his foot gets caught in a shrub and he trips.

Once on his feet, he follows the path Richie usually uses, it cuts through a small field and a couple of backyards; with his luck, he ends up banging his foot against a bucket and waking up a very large dog with a very angry sounding bark. He almost pees himself.

He makes it to Richies in a little under ten minutes, but finds himself standing outside staring at the side of his house for over fifteen. *What am I doing?* He breathes. *It's just Richie.* He reminds himself. *Yeah Richie, who is mad at you.* He wonders why internal dialogue is so difficult.

After working up the nerve he taps on Richies window, which thankfully, is even closer to the ground than his own. The blinds are drawn so Eddie can't even see if Richies in his room or not, he bites the inside of his cheek and waits. After a minute, he knocks again and few seconds later the curtains are being fussed with.

Eddie hadn't realized his heart had pounded its way into his mouth until he sees Richie's face, calm and unmoving. He doesn't greet him with a smile or even a hello, he only opens the window then steps aside.

Eddie hoists himself through and falls to the floor with a thud.

"Wake up the whole house why don't ya," Richie remarks while Eddie sits up from his spot on the carpet, he watches Richie pad over to his closet where an array of cd's are scattered across the floor, it looks like he's been doing some rearranging. Richie crouches down and starts fiddling with them. "What do you want?" he asks.

"You're ignoring me." Eddie states.

"Yeah, doesn't feel too good does it?"

"If it's about Tanner-"

"Of course it's about Tanner!" Richie's head snaps upward and he looks at Eddie wildly. Shock seems to sneak up on him, along with the small bit of satisfaction he feels from the way Richie's riled up like this. "Look, I know I don't have a private jet or mansion but-"

"Woa woa Richie, you know me better than that," Eddie disputes half-heartedly offended, he continues with, "and you never gave me an answer."

Richie breathes out and when he looks like he isn't going to say anything Eddie starts with,

"I want to be with you, Richie," he has a hard time getting it out, not because it isn't true but because he's never felt so exposed. "You don't even know the beginning of how I feel about you."

That makes Richie's hard features turn pulpy and Eddie recognizes

the fondness that had crept into his eyes. But he still doesn't say anything.

"He was saying goodbye and he only kissed me like that because he knew *you* were watching. He likes causing problems." Eddie explains, hoping to clear up Richie's suspicions.

"And I didn't- no- I *still* don't know how you feel."

A minute of staring passes and just when Eddie starts to feel anxious Richie finally says,

"I've been ignoring you for kissing another boy, I feel like it's pretty obvious by now."

Stunned, Eddie takes a moment before responding with, "I guess I'm just shit at reading people."

"It never was your strong suit."

Richie stands and slowly strides over to where Eddie is still sitting, Eddie follows him with his eyes, lifting his head higher and higher as Richie gets closer and closer. Eddie's breathing shallows as Richie hovers over him, suddenly he drops down to his knees and puts his hands onto Eddie's shoulders.

"Hi," he says softly, a dizzying smile dawning over his lips.

"Hi," Eddie squeaks back, he blinks a couple times, trying to convince himself he isn't hallucinating all of this.

Richie leans in and kisses him. And then kisses him some more.

Eddie only pulls away because the voice of reason keeps talking over his lustful desires.

"Are you sure Richie?" he says a little out of breath, "If we do this, I can't be your friend anymore."

"I know Eds."

Still not entirely convinced he says,

"You know this means you're going to have to have sex with me."

Richie smiles when he says, "Yes Eds, and I'm looking forward to it."

Eddie dies right then and there.

He pulls Richie in by his shirt and smashes their faces together. The way he kisses him is desperate, he claws at his back and tugs on his hair. Richie returns his kisses with a matched intensity that only fuels Eddie's hunger. He pushes Richie down onto his back and without breaking their kiss, climbs on top of him. They kiss for so long and everything is warm, Eddie is drowning in warmth, drowning in Richie.

When they separate they're both panting.

"Oh my god Eddie," Richie says breathlessly keeping his hands on Eddie's sides, he looks up at Eddie with blown pupils and messy hair. Eddie wants to- then he realizes he can- he bends over again and runs his fingers through Richie's curls.

Richie watches him warmly and starts to run his hands up and down Eddie's thighs. And Eddie can barely handle it, he has to close his eyes, because *this* is just too much, looking at Richie like this is *too* much.

Eddie eventually closes the space between their bodies and smashes his face into Richie's collarbone. There, just like that, he says,

"I love you."

"Have you ever suspected that Richie likes me?" Eddie asks. Bill's in the middle of writing something when the question is brought up. Bill pauses for a moment to look over at Eddie and when Eddie looks back, he finds a bit of surprise in his eyes.

"I mean, sure I think it's a possibility, but with the way you act when the topic comes up- you're never going to find out." Bill explains, a beat of silence goes by and he squints at Eddie. "Why do you ask? Did something happen?"

Bill seems to already know the answer to that, but it still doesn't stop

him from asking, Eddie shrugs in return.

"Yeah," Eddie drawls, but he doesn't say anything further. Bill's staring at him, waiting.

"Okay...are you going to leave me high and dry?"

Eddie has almost been afraid to talk about it, afraid to jinx it, to be jolted awake from this fantasy. Only then he comes to terms with the idea that talking about it will probably make it even more real.

"I think- we're together."

Bill doesn't say anything for a while and that starts to make Eddie nervous.

"Yeah?" He finally says, "how did that happen?

"I have no idea." Eddie responds looking at the question differently than how Bill probably had meant it.

"Well, good for you." Bill says, letting it go, his face cracks into a smile and Eddie has something he wants to say.

"I'm sorry Bill. I'm sorry I was such a dick to you, you didn't deserve that at all." Eddie confesses, his eyes don't waver from Bill's and there's guilt furling around the edges of his frown. Bill doesn't drop his smile.

"It's okay. I shouldn't have pried, I guess I didn't realize how intense the situation was."

"You were only trying to help."

"Yeah," he says and leaves it at that.

Eddie doesn't think he'll ever get used to Richie's hands.

A hand resting at the top of his thigh, one moving to touch his cheek, another snaking up underneath his shirt. And everytime Eddie feels that warmth, he has to choke down his initial surprise. He isn't sure when this shock is going to fade, but he definitely not complaining.

As of now, Richie has a hand on his back and they're laying in his bed. Eddie is curled up at Richie's side, his head nudged into where Richie's shoulder meets his arm and suddenly, Richie laughs.

"What?" Eddie questions, he can't see Richie's face but he can picture his smile.

"You're like a cat," he answers and that wasn't really what Eddie was expecting to hear.

"Why do you say that?"

"I don't know, the way you're curled up on me reminds me of a cat." Richie tightens his arm around Eddie for a second before he releases him and bring a hand up to stroke Eddie's hair. "You're also soft and cute." Richie whispers that last part and it makes all the hair of Eddie's body stand up.

He nestles deeper into Richie and they're unbelievably close.

"I never saw us ending up here." Eddie says faintly, it's muffled due to Richie's shirt catching most of it. Richie's hand stops moving for a second, wisps of Eddie's hair weaved between his fingers, then he resumes.

"I could," his voice is quiet, "there's no one else I'd rather spend all my time with."

Eddie bursts into flames.

"Not even Nina the hyena?"

"Especially not Nina the hyena," Richie laughs, "apart from that awful laugh, she's got funny tits."

"Well lucky for you my tits are no joke."

Richie laughs again then he untangles his fingers from Eddie's hair and returns his arm to Eddie's back. For a moment he cradles him, then he uses his free hand to grab Eddie's arm and pull him onto his chest. He winds both arms around him, tight and secure. Eddie's heart is pounding.

"Show me your tits," Richie whispers provocatively in Eddie's ear, Eddie grins against Richie's chest.

"You pig, you haven't even bought me dinner yet." Eddie retaliates and he feels Richie go still beneath him.

"You're gosh darn right!" he suddenly erupts, startling Eddie. Richie abruptly shoves him off and hops out of bed. "Grab your coat dear, we're going out!" Richie exclaims, scouring his room for a pair of pants.

Eddie, who's still lying in bed, props himself up on his elbows.

"What? Now?"

"Yes now, why else would I be putting pants on?" Richie says while putting pants on.

"I hate you." Eddie mumbles rolling out of bed.

"Hey! We decided not to use that word anymore. It's triggering."

Eddie shakes his head, but he's smiling.

As he stands there watching Richie try to beat his score in pac man, he feels so much affection that he thinks he's about to throw up.

"Fuck fuck fuck!" Richie swears throwing his hands in the air and kicking the bottom of the machine. "It's rigged."

"No you just suck," Eddie smiles wanting so badly to kiss him.

"That is just false." Richie retorts lamely, he slinks an arm over Eddie's shoulders and stirs him in the direction of the exit. "There's one more place I'd like to go."

Eddie has no idea where they're headed until they're walking through the entrance of a pet store. Richie leaves his side to run over to where the cats are displayed.

"Oh my god Eddie that one looks like you." Richie says as soon as Eddie makes his way over, he's pointing at a completely brown cat

with light brown eyes. "I want that one," he almost whispers and before Eddie even has the chance to respond, Richie disappears again. When he returns it's with one of the store employee's who looks a little less than happy to be doing his job.

"You can't be serious Rich, you can barely take care of yourself." Eddie says a little wide eyed and surprised.

"That's why I have you." Richie says lifting a hand to pat Eddie on the cheek.

"Which one?" The employee says, his patience running thin.

"That one," Richie responds, again pointing at the brown cat.

"Oh my god Richie." Eddie says realizing that he *is* serious. Richie continues to beam.

Ross (the employee) leads them into a room where they can meet the cat, Richie sits on the floor and when Ross puts the cat down it looks around, blinks, then stays where it is. Richie clicks his tongue and snaps his fingers several different ways trying to lure the cat over, but he is only stared at instead.

"He hates you," Eddie says.

"Fuck off." Richie retorts, he puts a hand on the ground and moves his fingers around. "Come to papi."

"Ew," Eddie comments before moving to sit next to him, a second later the cat comes over and rubs up against Eddie's knee.

"Are you fucking kidding me?" Richie says, Eddie laughs then picks up his hand and runs it down the cat's back, it starts to pur. Finally, it stalks over to Richie and the smile it puts on his face almost convinces Eddie that this is a good idea.

"I've always wanted a cat," Richie says watching it lean into his palm.

"It's a lot of responsibility," Eddie replies, sounding like a parent.

"I know but I need some stability in my life."

Eddie doesn't fight him about it anymore because honestly, he's warmed up to the furry guy too.

"He's so nice." Richie says softly as it climbs into his lap, pawing at his leg. Richie pets him for over twenty minutes before Ross comes back and says,

"So?"

"I'll take him."

Richie spent a small fortune on cat food, cat toys and a fancy litter box with automatic air freshening abilities, Eddie still isn't sure how they managed to get everything back to Richie's house via two pairs of hands.

When they get back into Richie's room the cat sniffs around before curling up on the surface of Richie's bedside table and falling asleep. Eddie's watching him when he asks,

"What are you going to name him?"

"I was thinking Eddie." Richie responds also watching the cat. Eddie looks at him.

"Richie no- that will become very confusing very quickly."

"Nah, I'll call him Eddie and you Eds."

"Richie-"

"That way if you tragically die somehow I still have another Eddie."

This earns an eye roll and a head shake. "It's your cat I guess."

After a few minutes Richie suddenly smiles at him, "He's like a little souvenir from our first date."

Eddie's heart swells and Richie must have noticed something on his face because he gets closer and kisses him.

"Don't worry, you're always going to be Eddie number one."

"How comforting." Eddie says wrapping his arms around Richie's torso, he buries his head into his chest and breathes in deeply. They stay like this for a minute before Eddie let's go and moves to lay on the bed. Richie follows, taking his pants off first.

They situate themselves in the same position they had been in pre-cat and Eddie still can't get over it.

Eddie (the cat) moves from the night side table onto the bed, he curls up on Richie's free side.

They don't say anything else for the rest of the night, instead they share something unspoken. At some point they have to remove Eddie (the cat) from the bed.

They move together in unison and it isn't Eddie's first time seeing Richie naked but it's the first time he's seen him looking like that. And Eddie has had sex many times before but it never felt like this and it's never meant this much either. He expected that having Richie against him so close would do something to him, but he didn't expect this, he didn't know he could feel like this.

When it's over he's left with so many things, so many feelings; and he can't help but wonder how he could ever think what he feels for Richie is anything less than beautiful.